

Women-Led Development

Mains: GSI – Indian Society

Why in News?

The National Commission for Women (NCW) held a consultation on women's property rights and access to social and economic justice, highlighting the need to shift from welfare-based empowerment to women-led development.

What is Women-Led Development?

- **Women-led development** – It moves beyond treating women as beneficiaries of welfare schemes and recognises them as active participants and leaders in all aspects.
- It integrates –
- **Economic empowerment** – Ownership of assets, access to finance and livelihood opportunities.
- **Political empowerment** – Representation in elected bodies and leadership positions.
- **Social empowerment** – Equal rights, dignity and freedom from discriminatory practices.
- **Institutional empowerment** – Participation in decision-making and leadership across public and private institutions.
- **Legal empowerment** – Awareness of rights and effective access to justice.

WOMEN-LED DEVELOPMENT



What is the Difference Between Distributive and Compensatory Justice?

- **Distributive Justice** - Ensures equitable access to resources and opportunities according to people's needs.
 - Focuses on preventing inequality by addressing unequal resource distribution.
 - **Constitutional provisions** - Articles 38, 39 and 46.
 - In *Air India Statutory Corporation v. United Labour Union* (1996), the Supreme Court emphasised distributive justice as a means of establishing an egalitarian social order.
- **Compensatory Justice** - Provides remedies, protection and compensation to address discrimination, exploitation and existing inequalities.
 - Includes legal safeguards, welfare schemes, reservations and victim compensation.
 - Constitutional provisions - Articles 17 and 23, which prohibit untouchability, trafficking and forced labour.
 - Section 396 of the *Bharatiya Nagarik Suraksha Sanhita (BNSS)*, 2023, provides for victim compensation schemes.
- **Key distinction** - Distributive justice seeks to prevent inequality, while compensatory justice seeks to address its consequences.

Why Are Women's Property Rights Important?

- **Economic independence** - Property ownership improves women's financial security and reduces dependence on family members.
- **Social empowerment** - Ownership strengthens bargaining power, social status and

participation in household decisions.

- **Gender equality** – Equal inheritance rights recognise women as independent rights-holders rather than passive beneficiaries.
- **Poverty reduction** – Asset ownership can improve women's access to credit, livelihood opportunities and economic security.

What are the Constitutional and Legal Provisions for Women's Property Rights?

- **Article 14** – Guarantees equality before the law and equal protection of laws.
- **Article 15** – Prohibits discrimination on grounds including sex; Article 15(3) permits special provisions for women and children.
- **Article 21** – Protects life and personal liberty, interpreted by the Supreme Court to include human dignity.
- **Article 300A** – Protects every person against deprivation of property except by authority of law.
- **Hindu Succession Act, 1956** – The 2005 amendment granted daughters equal coparcenary rights in Hindu joint family property.
- **Vineeta Sharma v. Rakesh Sharma (2020)** – The Supreme Court held that a daughter acquires coparcenary status by birth, irrespective of whether her father was alive on the date of the amendment.
- Other relevant laws include the Hindu Marriage Act, 1955, the Special Marriage Act, 1954, and applicable maintenance and inheritance laws.

What are the Major Challenges to Women's Empowerment?

- **Patriarchal mindset** – Social attitudes often discourage women from claiming inheritance and property rights.
- **Poor legal awareness** – Many women lack information about their legal entitlements and remedies.
- **Limited access to justice** – Legal costs, procedural delays and dependence on intermediaries restrict access to remedies.
- **Implementation gaps** – Existing laws and policies often fail to translate into effective ownership and control of assets.
- **Weak institutional support** – Complex land records and mutation procedures make it difficult to establish and enforce property claims.
- **Limited decision-making power** – Women may possess legal rights but lack meaningful control over assets and household decisions.

What Measures are Needed to Promote Women-Led Development?

- **Gender-sensitive land records** – Digitise property records, simplify mutation procedures and accurately record women's ownership shares.
- **Improve legal literacy** – Conduct awareness campaigns through Self-Help Groups (SHGs) and community institutions.
- **Strengthen legal aid** – Improve access to free legal assistance and grievance-redressal mechanisms.
- **Enforce existing laws** – Strengthen implementation and monitoring rather than relying solely on new legislation.

- **Promote women's leadership** - Provide women with leadership opportunities across governance, institutions and economic sectors.
- **Ensure policy convergence** - Coordinate constitutional safeguards, legal institutions, welfare programmes and economic policies.
- **Change social attitudes** - Promote equal inheritance, shared decision-making and recognition of women's independent rights.

What lies ahead?

- Achieving gender justice requires moving beyond welfare-oriented empowerment towards equal access to resources, enforceable property rights and meaningful participation in decision-making.
- Women-led development must recognise women not merely as beneficiaries of growth, but as equal partners and leaders in nation-building.

Reference

[The Hindu| Women-Led Development Model](#)

